ANIMERICA INTERVIEW

# MASAMI YUKI

The manga artist of ***Mobile Police Patlabor*** tells all about doin' time in the Tokyo Special Vehicles Division

# Masami Yuki

One of the five founding members of Headgear and the manga artist for ***Mobile Police Patlabor***, Masami Yuki tells all about his vision of the "ten years in the future" that turned into our modern times. Interview by

**Takayuki Karahashi**

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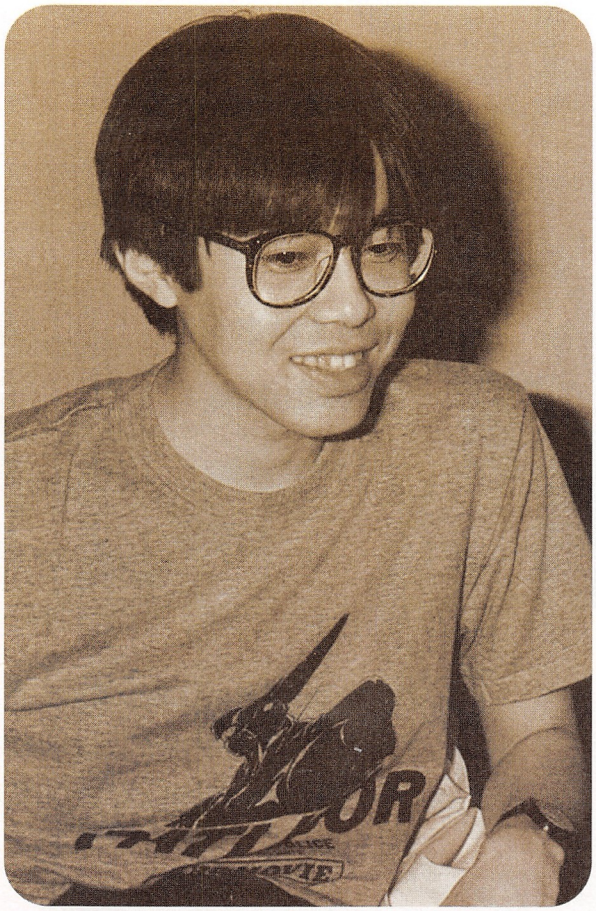


**Masami Yuki, circa 1989**

"When Masami Yuki and I first met each other," mecha designer Yutaka Izubuchi remarked in his own ANIMERICA interview, a few years back, "we'd spend time coming up with these mock project proposals we could work on with other people in the industry. There was this police robot story that I thought might warrant further interest. The idea was that I'd do the mecha and Yuki would do the characters."

Nearly ten years later, the "police robot story" which became ***Mobile Police Patlabor*** has spawned a small cottage industry, with a seven-volume OAV series, two feature films, a 48-episode television series and a second, 16-volume OAV series released as a companion to the TV series' video release, toys, model kits, books...and Masami Yuki's manga.

First published in early 1988 in Shogakukan's monthly manga magazine SHÔNEN SUNDAY, the ***Mobile Police Patlabor*** manga kept the "police robot story" going for over twenty volumes, from 1988, which also marked the start of the video series, to 1994, well after the last (at least, so far) anime release—the 1993 theatrical feature ***Patlabor 2***. And while the manga touches on the events of the video series from time to time, it features, for the most part, a original storyline that's completely Yuki's own creation, with a focus on the more day-to-day character development and business-as-usual robot action that rarely makes the spotlight in the OAV or movie versions of the story. (The TV series, though, is another matter—in many ways the ***Patlabor*** TV series is based on Yuki's manga version of the story, rather than the original OAV incarnation.) When asked to describe the difference between the manga and animated ***Patlabor***, Yuki laughs.

"I think you get to see more of the Ingram in *action* in the manga," he says.

An artist who began working by submitting a parody strip to the magazine OUT, Yuki (pronounced with a long "u" sound) has become a successful artist with a light touch and a keen eye for the comedy inherent in most human affairs, gathering a lot of his ideas from the day-today happenings he sees on TV news, sports and livecast programs.

"I tend to watch live broadcasts," Yuki confesses, admitting a love for "tabloid" TV shows—the Japanese equivalents of ***Hard Copy*** or ***Cops***. "I might watch more TV drama shows if they were also live, but they're still drama, and it's not like unpredictable things will be happening in real time these days. I hear they had *many* interesting incidents with live drama back when TV was just getting started. On the other hand, a while ago, they had a two-hour live Christmas special on the Tuesday Suspense Theater, but it ran without anything special happening," he laughs. Aside from such news and sports events, the only anime he'll admit to watching on TV recently is ***Neon Genesis Evangelion***. "I guess that was the only show I watched every week for the first time in many years, although I haven't seen the movie," he says. According to Yuki, when not drawing, most of his free time is spent reading—"I like mystery-solving stories in general, like ancient archaeology"—and catching the occasional mystery-themed TV show like ***The X-Files***. "Although they never actually *solve* mysteries in that one," he observes wryly.

When looking through Yuki's manga, it's easy to see how such "realistic" and "mystery-solving" elements get incorporated into his stories, but it's also clear that he doesn't enjoy getting *too* serious.

"***Patlabor*** turned out unintentionally realistic with both feet on the ground," he says. "If I had it to do again, I don't think I'd do it that way every time. Early on, the police officer girl main character...was a lighter character, who could have joked through greater Tokyo going up in an explosion and surviving it. ***Patlabor*** *could* have turned out as that kind of manga."

BEGIN INTERVIEW

**ANIMERICA: How did you get your start as a manga artist?**

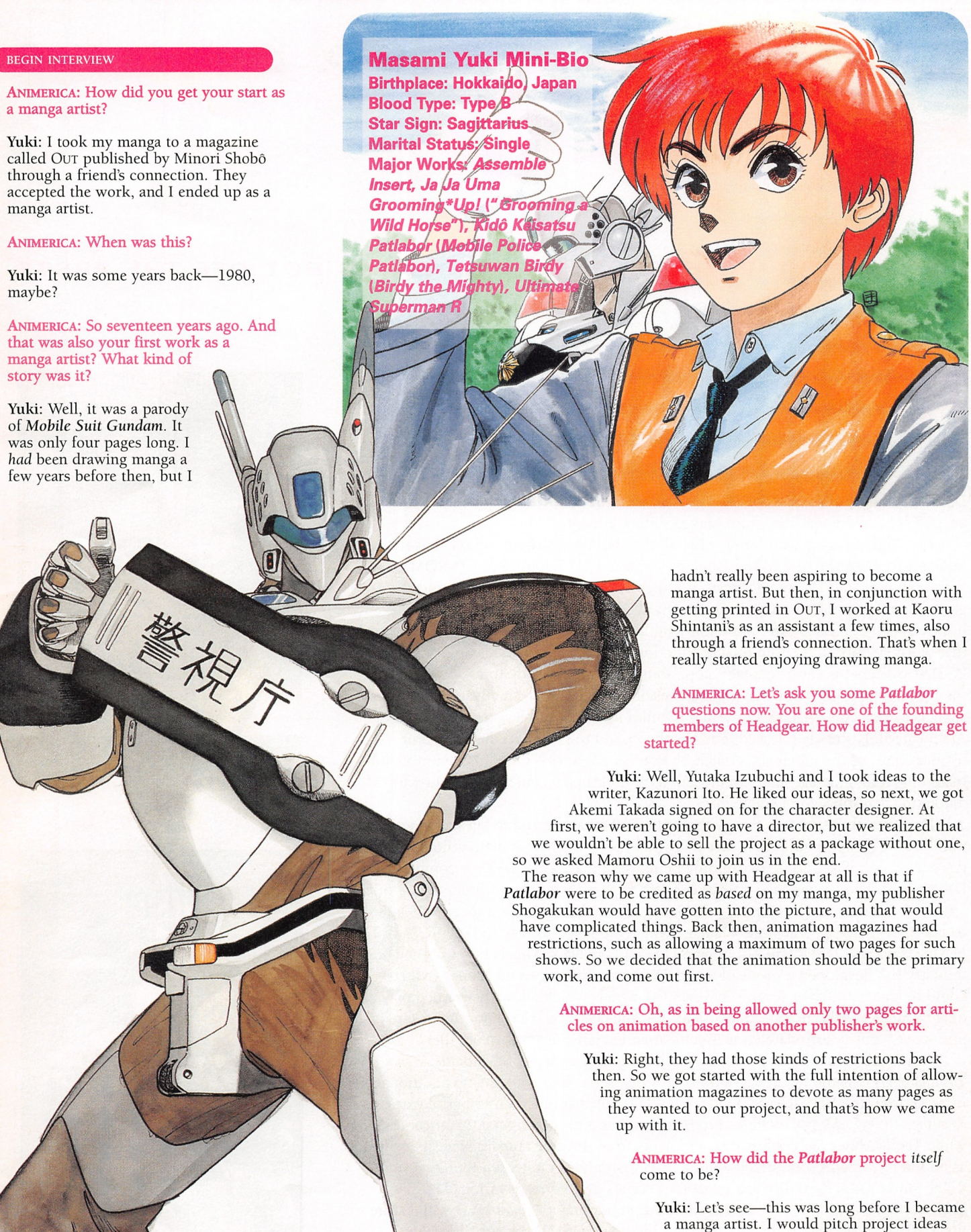
**Yuki:** I took my manga to a magazine called OUT published by Minori Shobō through a friend's connection. They accepted the work, and I ended up as a manga artist.

**ANIMERICA: When was this?**

**Yuki:** It was some years back—1980, maybe?

**ANIMERICA: So seventeen years ago. And that was also your first work as a manga artist? What kind of story was it?**

**Yuki:** Well, it was a parody of *Mobile Suit Gundam*. It was only four pages long. I *had* been drawing manga a few years before then, but I hadn't really been aspiring to become a manga artist. But then, in conjunction with getting printed in OUT, I worked at Kaoru Shintani's as an assistant a few times, also through a friend's connection. That's when I really started enjoying drawing manga.


Masami Yuki Mini-Bio
Birthplace: Hokkaido, Japan
Blood Type: Type B
Star Sign: Sagittarius
Marital Status: Single
Major Works: *Assemble Insert*, *Ja Ja Uma Grooming*Up!* (*"Grooming a Wild Horse"*), *Kidô Keisatsu Patlabor* (*Mobile Police Patlabor*), *Tetsuwan Birdy* (*Birdy the Mighty*), *Ultimate Superman R*
警視庁

**ANIMERICA: Let's ask you some *Patlabor* questions now. You are one of the founding members of Headgear. How did Headgear get started?**

**Yuki:** Well, Yutaka Izubuchi and I took ideas to the writer, Kazunori Ito. He liked our ideas, so next, we got Akemi Takada signed on for the character designer. At first, we weren't going to have a director, but we realized that we wouldn't be able to sell the project as a package without one, so we asked Mamoru Oshii to join us in the end.

The reason why we came up with Headgear at all is that if *Patlabor* were to be credited as *based* on my manga, my publisher Shogakukan would have gotten into the picture, and that would have complicated things. Back then, animation magazines had restrictions, such as allowing a maximum of two pages for such shows. So we decided that the animation should be the primary work, and come out first.

**ANIMERICA: Oh, as in being allowed only two pages for articles on animation based on another publisher's work.**

**Yuki:** Right, they had those kinds of restrictions back then. So we got started with the full intention of allowing animation magazines to devote as many pages as they wanted to our project, and that's how we came up with it.

**ANIMERICA: How did the *Patlabor* project *itself* come to be?**

**Yuki:** Let's see—this was long before I became a manga artist. I would pitch project ideas

with a friend, Tomato Aki. I mentioned one of our ideas to Izubuchi, and he liked it. A long time ago, we once took the idea to Sunrise and they once rejected it.

ANIMERICA: When was this?

**Yuki:** Well, this was…1983, I think?

ANIMERICA: And then what happened to *Patlabor* after that?

**Yuki:** After that, I kept on doing my own private sketches, and at one time, asked Ito if it wouldn't be possible to do something about it again. He suggested it might be possible to do it as an OAV, so he introduced us to a producer at Bandai. Let's see, when was this…I remember. It was on Christmas day that we met with the producer, and project first got its start.

ANIMERICA: For the video series?

**Yuki:** For the video.

ANIMERICA: You've written previously in your NEWTYPE column about getting your *Patlabor* project mobilized. Was it around that time?

**Yuki:** Yes, it was a little before then. But I wrote that *after* the project got its go-ahead, so it was actually about a year before the column.

ANIMERICA: How does your *Patlabor* manga relate to the animated *Patlabor*?

**Yuki:** Well, the manga I was drawing prior to that, ***Ultimate Superman R***, had ended its serialization. I was taking an extended vacation after that, and it was about time I needed to start a new serial. So I asked if I could do a manga on the project I was involved in. My early intentions were that I would have been happy if it worked as advertisement for the OAV.

ANIMERICA: In the end, it turned into quite a long serial, didn't it?

**Yuki:** I got into it as I drew. I was having so much fun with it, and was coming up with so many story ideas. As a result, what I thought was going to be a quick three-month job turned into something like a six-year run…was it really *six*?

ANIMERICA: The original setting for *Patlabor* was ten years in the future from the time it was published, in the late 1990s, which makes it right about today. How is the world today? Is it what you envisioned as happening in *Patlabor*, perhaps minus the robots?

**Yuki:** Well, perhaps I wasn't *that* off. The story does start off in 1998. But I guess nowadays you should think of it as some generic "ten years into the future."

ANIMERICA: Although, we no longer have the Berlin Wall.

**Yuki:** True. That really took me by surprise.

ANIMERICA: Do you think actual robots like labors will be developed?

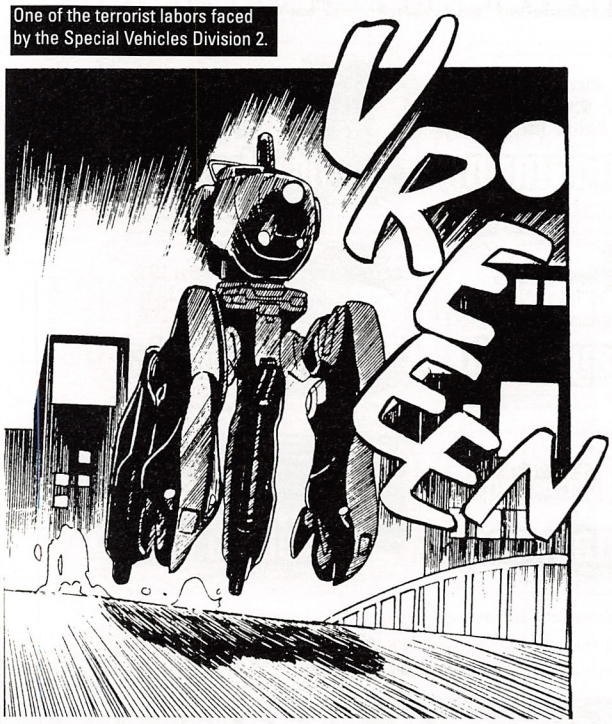
**Yuki:** Actually, I don't think they're really necessary. If anything is developed, I'm sure they'll be far smaller.

ANIMERICA: About man-sized?

**Yuki:** I think that'd be the most usable, although I still wouldn't be sure how practical they'd be. They did recently come up with a prototype bipedal humanoid robot that walks on its own.

ANIMERICA: So they could be used in environments too dangerous for man.

SAFETY FIRST
IT'S JUST LIKE THE ANIME SHOWS ON TV!
Hee Hee Hee
I HATE TO DISAPPOINT YOU, BUT THIS ONE DOESN'T FLY LIKE THE ONES ON TV!
...I JOINED THE FORCE BECAUSE OF THESE LABORS!
UH-HUH.
WHAT?
IT DOESN'T FLY?
LOOK...I UNDERSTAND, BUT LISTEN...
...IT MAY NOT BE ABLE TO FLY...
...BUT IT'S STILL A REVOLUTIONARY MODEL!
Noa's first look at the new AV-98 Ingram Police labor, or "Patlabor."



One of the terrorist labors faced by the Special Vehicles Division 2.

**Yuki:** Yes. I went to see MITI's robots as part of my field research, and in order to perform in environments too dangerous for man, they don't necessarily have to be humanoid. Of course, it's my personal feeling that it'd be more interesting to see them humanoid.

ANIMERICA: As for the *Patlabor* manga itself, did you have any story input from other members of Headgear or was it entirely your own work?

**Yuki:** The very first story is based on Episode One of the videos. It's practically the same story. After that, though—especially the Schaft stories—it became entirely my own. We—Headgear, that is—didn't have direct input with each other, but I got certain inspirations from the animated episodes. We had feedback going on in that fashion.

ANIMERICA: How do you describe the difference between the manga *Patlabor* and the animated *Patlabor* in your own words?

**Yuki:** Well, I think you get to see more of the Ingram in *action* in the manga. [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Is that a matter of directing?

**Yuki:** Well, I'm not sure whether or not you can call it that, but as for me, I first thought the animation would be more of a robot action story, but it didn't turn out that way. I kind of resented that, and that's how I was motivated to develop the Schaft story. But once I'd introduced Schaft, they stayed in until the end, so I think that's how we got that kind of development.

ANIMERICA: Although in the manga, too, the characters shine through even more than the mecha.

**Yuki:** That's true, but I do think the anime had far more character-only stories. Of course, the feedback process happened with the characters too, so they really developed depth.

ANIMERICA: What would you say is the main appeal of ***Patlabor***? Would it be the characters? The action?

**Yuki:** I wonder.

ANIMERICA: ...the comedy?

**Yuki:** I wonder what *would* be the appeal. Maybe you can say it's the characters. Well, this might sound weird, but when you heat a substance, its molecules start to bump into each other. Perhaps the appeal is in something similar to that. Molecules start to lose their rigidity and start to collide, don't they? I think the fun is in observing that phenomenon.

ANIMERICA: So it's the conflict between characters? That's one of the basics of drama, isn't it?

**Yuki:** True, not that I had prepared any great clashes between any two individual characters. The fun is in observing the cast as a whole.

ANIMERICA: How is drawing robots in manga? Is it hard work?

**Yuki:** Well, if you overdo the process of pasting screentone and giving shadows, you end up with drawings that are hard to make out. On a basic level, knowing when to stop was a difficult process. And the labors weren't something I was used to drawing, so the penciling was tough. I let my assistants ink the drawings, but I did most of the pencils, so work was indeed tough on installations with lots of labors.

ANIMERICA: Do you ever use computers for drawing?

**Yuki:** Well, not around the time of ***Patlabor***. Right now, there's a lot of print that shows up in the story I'm working on now. I use computer printouts for that. But I have nothing that can be called a drawing from a computer yet.

ANIMERICA: By print, do you mean text that's neither in the word balloons or sound effects?

**Yuki:** Right, they aren't sound effects. I'm drawing a manga that frequently shows newspapers, so I create the newsprint art with a computer. It has a variety of fonts, so newsprint is easy to make, especially the pages of sports papers. Using a computer makes creating these very easy. So I use it there.

ANIMERICA: The ***Patlabor*** manga is coming out now, but the animation has already been brought over to the U.S. market.

**Yuki:** It has?

ANIMERICA: Yes, and the work has developed a following. What do you think of ***Patlabor*** becoming popular in the U.S.?

**Yuki:** Well, I'm curious to know how my manga does. I've heard about the animation doing okay. But if you ask me how I'd think a story like ***Patlabor*** would fare in the U.S., I don't think it'd be *that* big of a success. I'd find it somewhat surprising if it becomes any big.

ANIMERICA: Do you own any ***Patlabor*** toys and models?

**Yuki:** Well, the figures that Kaiyodo put out and gave to me are displayed in my room. I don't have the time to build models these days, but until I was in high school, I used to build Tamiya's military series that was rather popular. But after high school graduation, I've hardly built any. I have built a few when model boxes just happened to be around, though. The unbuilt model I'm keeping around in the box right now is a Tamiya Tiger I.

ANIMERICA: So you were more interested in realistic models, and not the likes of ***Space Cruiser Yamato***?

**Yuki:** I haven't built those, no.

ANIMERICA: Would you say that you tend to have a realistic tendency?

**Yuki:** Well, I don't *think* so, but let me think about that. Well...if I were going to build a model, it might as well be based on an *existing* thing.

ANIMERICA: You've written before in your NEWTYPE column that you have sworn not to portray the fantastic in your manga.

**Yuki:** Oh, yes. I said that I won't, for a while.

ANIMERICA: "For a while"?

**Yuki:** I wanted to make that off limits for a while, with the likes of the Aum cult causing trouble in this country.

ANIMERICA: So do you consider ***Patlabor*** a fantastic story?

**Yuki:** I made that resolve after the Aum incident—that was after I had finished ***Patlabor***—but no, it probably isn't. I'd always

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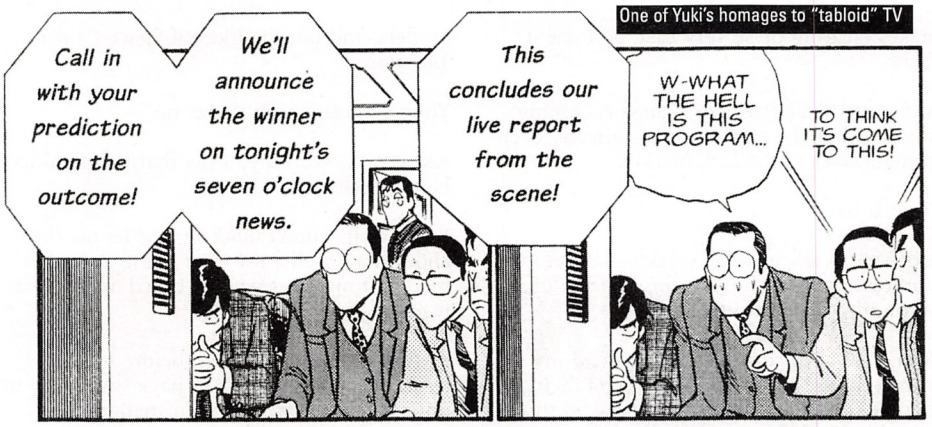

Call in with your prediction on the outcome!
We'll announce the winner on tonight's seven o'clock news.
This concludes our live report from the scene!
W-WHAT THE HELL IS THIS PROGRAM...
TO THINK IT'S COME TO THIS!
One of Yuki's homages to "tabloid" TV

liked to fantasize and had drawn manga in that fashion. ***Patlabor*** turned out unintentionally realistic with both feet on the ground. I don't think I'd do it that way every time. Early on when I was tossing the idea around with Tomato Aki, the police officer girl main character was far more rough, and as a character—remember the Dirty Pair? I think she was more like them.

ANIMERICA: You mean a dark destroyer that levels cities?

**Yuki:** [LAUGHS] Well, maybe not that bad, but someone who could do that while giggling.

ANIMERICA: Was she wearing a skimpy costume with big breasts and a big gun?

**Yuki:** No, not like that. I meant as in the character's personality.

ANIMERICA: So not her appearance, but—

**Yuki:** Right, not her appearance but personality. [AHEM] She was a lighter character, who could have joked through greater Tokyo going up in an explosion and surviving it. *Patlabor could* have turned out as that kind of manga.

ANIMERICA: A manga rather skimpy in realism.

**Yuki:** Yes. It could have been a police comedy like that.

ANIMERICA: Like ***Police Academy***?

**Yuki:** Oh yes, there was some movie called ***Police Academy***, wasn't there....[PAUSE]... Well, back then, the majority of OAVs usually turned into those kinds of stories.

ANIMERICA: They would start by targeting their market primarily to young males?

**Yuki:** You can say that.

ANIMERICA: In that vein, you don't draw female characters that would instantly be appealing to drooling males.

**Yuki:** I guess I don't really like those types. [LAUGHS] I'd say it's a matter of preference. If I drew such a character, I wouldn't be able to believe in her. I think that's a form of unilateral female worship that's this close to female abuse.

ANIMERICA: Just a paper-thin border?

**Yuki:** Paper-thin. I don't think it's healthy to excessively idolize, and I think it's better to include *un*flattering aspects of a girl character within my ability to portray her. I find boyish girls easier to portray in that sense—it's easier to do a story without making things look disgusting.

ANIMERICA: The setting for ***Patlabor*** looks obviously like Tokyo with your realistic portrayal of the city. Do you think this will help or hinder American readers of the manga?

**Yuki:** I suppose they'd understand, yes, but I always thought that by confining the story to Tokyo, it may not necessarily appeal to foreign readers. Well, I'm sure the story is easier to follow that way, but that's a separate question from whether they'd find it exciting. In that sense, the very first ***Patlabor*** idea, where it would have taken place in space, might have had wider appeal. But actually, if anything, I *didn't* want to make it a story without any sort of nationality.

ANIMERICA: Do you think American readers witll react differently than Japanese readers to ***Patlabor***'s story and characters? How do you think they'll react differently?

**Yuki:** Well, I'm really *not* thinking. I'll be happy for anyone if they read the manga at all and enjoy it.

ANIMERICA: Where do you get inspirations for your stories? Other manga, movies, TV?

**Yuki:** There's a lot from TV. I do like TV and watch it a lot. A lot of the more plebeian materials in ***Patlabor*** get their hints from tabloid shows. They are a treasure chest of silly incidents.

ANIMERICA: Including false reports?

**Yuki:** I suppose, and exaggerated reporting too. Also, stories that are too funny for the serious nightly news. They inspire this kind of material.

ANIMERICA: So...is Elvis Presley alive?

**Yuki:** Huh...what? I heard he's dead.

ANIMERICA: Is he? According to American tabloids, he's still supposed to be alive at supermarkets.

**Yuki:** Oh, I see. Tabloid papers here often mention that, too.

ANIMERICA: Do you suppose he's really still alive, then?

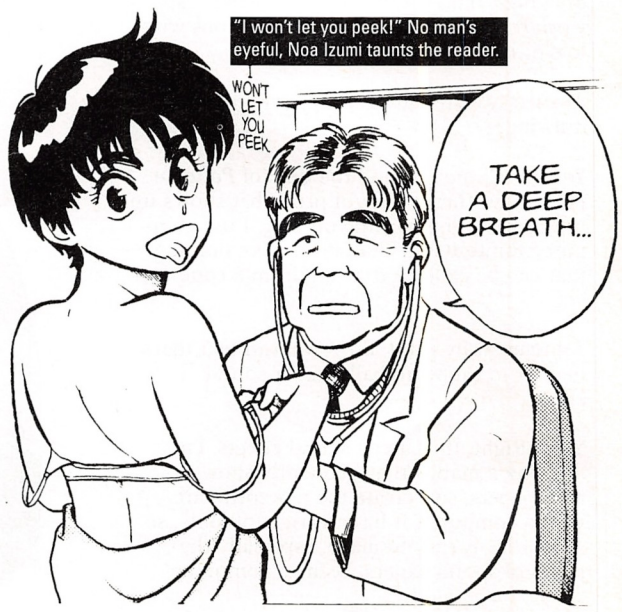
**Yuki:** Well, I'm sure that makes for a more interesting story. It's like a dream.

ANIMERICA: Getting back to ***Patlabor***, who would you say is your favorite character in the series?

**Yuki:** Well, I'd say Noa.

ANIMERICA: So does that mean Asuma is not the main character?

**Yuki:** Well, I don't think you can really say who the heroes and heroines *are* in that manga. I'm sure you can tell by reading it. You can say it has many main characters, and of course, Asuma is one of the main characters. But I think I was able to draw Noa the way I'd like my daughter to grow up if I had one.



"I won't let you peek!" No man's eyeful, Noa Izumi taunts the reader.

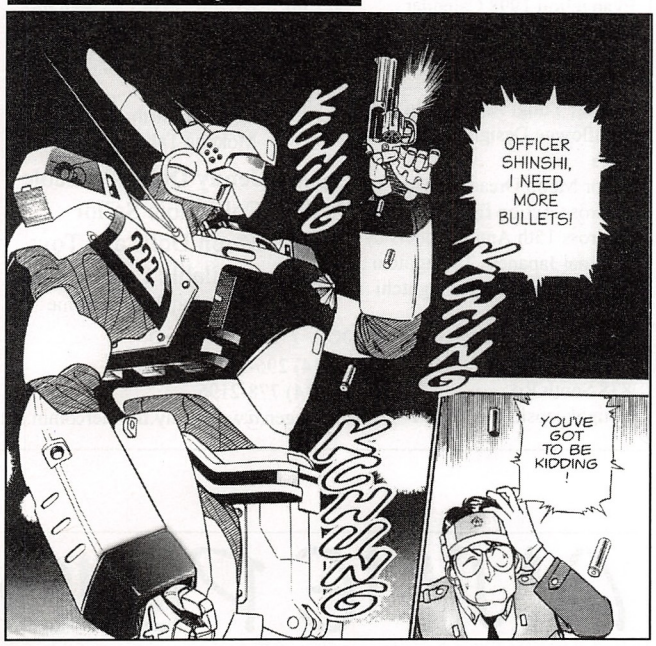
ANIMERICA: Which character was the most fun to draw?

**Yuki:** Well, the most fun character to draw was Goto.

ANIMERICA: The Captain? How about Nagumo?

**Yuki:** Well, I couldn't really envision Nagumo more than as a supporting character. I would get happy when I was able to draw her cute once in a while, though.

Officer Ota, armed and dangerous in his labor




ANIMERICA: On the other hand, her character is portrayed in more detail in the animation, especially in ***Patlabor 2***....

**Yuki:** Well, Mamoru Oshii is most fond of Nagumo. You can say Oshii did what he wanted to do with his favorite character.

ANIMERICA: Is there going to be any new ***Patlabor*** animation?

**Yuki:** Well, I don't think they'll be using the "Patlabor" title, though. They're making a film based on the manga story "Waste Product No. 13." I don't know when it's set for release. It started as a video project, but apparently, it turned into a movie. I have no idea how these things get decided.

ANIMERICA: I look forward to seeing it.

**Yuki:** Half with enthusiasm and half with trepidation....

ANIMERICA: What kind of manga have you been drawing recently?

**Yuki:** I'm drawing the horse-racing manga ***Ja Ja Uma Grooming*Up!*** [*which can be alternately translated as "Grooming a Wild Horse" or "Grooming a Shrew"—Ed*]. Maybe not exactly a horse-racing manga, but a story about raising and training racing horses at the ranch.

ANIMERICA: What kind of story is it, and where is it headed?

**Yuki:** It starts off when a slacker high school boy gets tired of his parents' nagging, and goes off on a bicycle tour. Then, he finds help from a ranch when he runs out of supplies on the road. The ranch owner has four daughters, and in the current development, the main character's getting to like the second daughter. But she's not returning his affections, so he's frustrated. A regular love comedy. And in-between, it has horse-racing episodes. It's a manga that may or may not have less going on than ***Patlabor***, but I think it'll continue for at least another year. I do want to draw new stories too, but when you have a weekly serial, there realistically isn't time for anything else.

ANIMERICA: But you do have ideas.

**Yuki:** I want to draw a new ***Tetsuwan Birdy*** (*Birdy the Mighty*) story.

ANIMERICA: Do you already have plans for that?

**Yuki:** No plans. I'll start suffering as soon as I set up a plan.

ANIMERICA: Compared to your success in Japan, how important would you say international recognition is to you?

**Yuki:** Well, let's see. I could just say it's good if it sells. Basically, I send out my material for Japanese boys and girls, so beyond them, I think it's more of a supplemental audience. I don't think I'd be able to cater to an American audience, even if my work got more popular there. I have no idea about the readership there, after all.

ANIMERICA: Do you have any advice for aspiring manga artists?

**Yuki:** Well, I became a manga artist almost by luck, so I'm sure. They say that opportunity only has hair in front, don't they? You can grab hold of her only when she's coming toward you, that is. So you have to grab opportunity when it's in your reach. And the most important effort has to be in not letting go once you have it in your hand. Well, that might be all I can say.

ANIMERICA: Finally, can you send out a message to your readers in the English-speaking world?

**Yuki:** I wonder what I should say. Hold on one second. I don't have to be so conscious about the *English*-speaking world, do I?

ANIMERICA: The world, then.

**Yuki:** Well...[PAUSE]...There are things you can't accomplish even with effort. But you can't accomplish anything *without* effort.

ANIMERICA: I see. So you are giving us life advice?

**Yuki:** Perhaps. My manga is all like that recently. [LAUGHS] It's just that in the Japanese education system, they keep on telling you from elementary school on that accomplishments come as the result of effort. But there always are people whose efforts won't lead to accomplishments, for various reasons, *including* lack of competency. But everyone is different, with different learning speeds. Suppose for the duration of one school year, a classmate couldn't keep up with the learning. I really hate it when they brand him as a slacker for that. What I want to say is that you can *always* keep on walking at your own pace. But even so, results won't come without effort, and whether or not you can actually accomplish anything may still be up to luck.

ANIMERICA: Those are tough words.

**Yuki:** Perhaps it's just that I think delusions aren't healthy. ☆